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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [PM](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: PANAMANIAN JUDGE ORDERS DETENTION OF FORMER
NICARAGUAN PRESIDENT ALEMAN AND CRONIES

REF: A. PANAMA 610

[1](#)B. 05 PANAMA 2292

[1](#)1. (SBU) As first reported by Panamanian television early May 18, Panamanian Judge Adolfo Mejia has ruled that the money laundering case against former Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman and cronies (reftels) will go forward. Ruling on the evidence presented during a March 30 hearing, Mejia ordered Aleman and co-accused to be detained pending trial. This is a stunning blow to Aleman, and is the result of years of work by Panamanian and U.S. investigators and Panamanian prosecutors.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Upon receipt of the initial press reports, Embassy officers contacted Panamanian anti-corruption prosecutor Mercedes de Leon for a reaction to Judge Mejia's ruling. De Leon was clearly pleased by the news, but cautioned that she had not yet received her copy of the written ruling. Among the issues to be clarified is whether charges against any of the co-accused had been dismissed (Note: press reports indicated that Ethel and Valeria Jerez may have been exonerated.) De Leon promised to share copies of any relevant documents, including the judge's ruling, with USG officials. She also signaled her intent to appeal decisions to dismiss charges against any of the accused.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Post will continue to monitor this case closely, including the possibility of appeals. At our urging, prosecutors will request that the judge expeditiously issue arrest warrants, which can then result in the issuance of INTERPOL red notices. It is not yet clear when the judge will schedule the beginning of the trial.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Comment: Panama's Public Ministry, including the investigators and prosecutors who have worked on this case over the past several years, deserve kudos for their dedication to seeing Aleman brought to justice. Attorney General Ana Matilde Gomez has been resolute in her personal commitment to this case. We believe that the consistent strong message of USG interest in this case, expressed both here and in Washington, helped counter efforts by the defense to tamper with the proceedings.
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